

MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS
ON THE
WAY OF THE CROSS

Abbe Michel Quoist

1. JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH



"So it was, brethren, that when I came to you and preached Christ's message to you, I did so without any high pretensions to eloquence, or to philosophy. I had no thought of bringing you any other knowledge than that of Jesus Christ, and of him as crucified. It was with distrust of myself, full of anxious fear, that I approached you; my preaching, my message depended on no persuasive language, devised by human wisdom, but rather on the proof I gave you of spiritual power; God's power, not man's wisdom, was to be the foundation of your faith." (1 Cor 2: 1-5)



Lord, it's too late for you to be quiet, you have spoken too much;
you have fought too much;
You were not sensible, you know, you exaggerated;
it was bound to happen.
You called the better people a breed of vipers,
You told them that their hearts were black sepulchres with fine exteriors,
You chose the decaying lepers,
You spoke fearlessly with unacceptable strangers,
You ate with notorious sinners, and you said that streetwalkers would be the first in Paradise.
You got on well with the poor, the bums, the crippled.
You belittled the religious regulations.
Your interpretation of the Law reduced it to one little commandment: to love.
Now they are avenging themselves.
They have taken steps against you; they have approached the authorities, and action will follow.



Lord, I know that if I try to live a little like you, I shall be condemned.
I am afraid. They are already singling me out.
Some smile at me, others laugh, some are shocked, and several of my friends are about to drop me.
I am afraid to stop,
I am afraid to listen to men's wisdom,
It whispers: you must go forward little by little, everything can't be taken literally, it's better to come to terms with the adversary...
And yet, Lord, I know that you are right.
Help me to fight,
Help me to speak,
Help me to live your Gospel
To the end,
To the folly of the Cross.

2. JESUS BEARS HIS CROSS



"If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce self, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. He who tries to save his life will lose it; it is the man who loses his life for my sake, that will save it." (Luke 9: 23-24)



Lord, here is your Cross.

Your Cross! As if it were your cross!

You had no cross and you came to get ours, and all through your life, and along the way to Calvary, you took upon you, one by one, the sins of the world.

You have to go forward,

And bend,

And suffer.

The Cross must be carried.



Lord, you walk on silently; is it true, then, that there is a time for speaking and a time for silence?
Is it true that there is a time for struggling and another for the silent bearing of our sins and the sins of the world?

Lord, I would rather fight the Cross; to bear it is hard. The more I progress, and the more I see the evil in the world, the heavier is the Cross on my shoulders.

Lord, help me to understand that the most generous deed is nothing unless it is also silently redemptive.

And since you want for me this long way of the Cross,

At the dawning of each day, help me to set forth.

3. JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME



"Jesus said to them [Simon and Simon's brother Andrew], 'Come and follow me; I will make you into fishers of men.' And they dropped their nets immediately, and followed him." (Mark 1: 17-18)

"But Jesus said to them [James and John], 'Have you strength to drink of the cup I am to drink of, to be baptized with the baptism I am to be baptized with?' They said to him, 'We have.'" (Mark 10: 38-39)

"But he took Peter and James and John with him. And now he grew dismayed and distressed... Then he went back, and found them asleep; and he said to Peter, 'Simon, art thou sleeping? Hadst thou not strength to watch even for an hour?'" (Mark 14: 33, 37)



He fell.
For a moment he staggered, then fell prostrate,
God in the dust.



And so, Lord, I follow you, setting out with confidence, and now I have fallen.
I thought I had given myself irrevocably to you, but I caught sight of a flower on a foot-path.
I left you, I left the cumbersome Cross, and here I am off the road, possessed of a few faded petals and my solitude.
And the others, Lord, pass along the road, broken, exhausted.
And crosses are in the making and backs are bending.
I am no longer there to fight evil and to help men to drag their loads,
I am off the road.

Lord, help me not only to follow after you but to keep steadily on.
Keep me from sudden weaknesses that leave me stupefied and empty, far from the place where you are shaping the world.

4. JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER



"... as for thy own soul, it shall have a sword to pierce it." (Luke 11:35)



Lord, I pity your poor mother.
She follows,
She follows you,
She follows mankind on its Way of the Cross.

She walks in the crowd, unknown, but she doesn't take her eyes off you.
Every gesture of yours, every sigh, every blow dealt you, every wound, pierces her heart.
She knows your sufferings,
She suffers your sufferings,
And without coming near you,
without touching you,
without speaking to you,
Lord, with you she saves the world.



Often, mingled with the crowd, I accompany men on their Way of the Cross,
And I am crushed by evil.
I feel incapable of saving the world; it is too heavy and rotten, and every day at the turn of the road I
become acquainted with new injustices and new impurities.

Lord, show me your mother Mary,
The useless one, the ineffectual one in the sight of men,
But the co-redemptrix in the sight of God.
Help me to walk among men, eager to know their miseries and their sins.

May I never avert my eyes,
May I never close my heart, that in welcoming the sufferings of the world, with Mary, your mother, I
may suffer and redeem.

5. SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS CARRY JESUS' CROSS



"... and led him away to be crucified. As for his cross, they forced a passer-by who was coming in from the country to carry it, one Simon of Cyrene ..." (Mark 15: 20-21)

"Bear the burden of one another's failings; then you will be fulfilling the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2)



He passed by on the road;
They pressed him into service,
The first to come along, a stranger.

Lord, you accepted his help.
You did not want the help of a friend, the solace of a gesture of love, the generous impulse of one who cared.
You chose the enforced help of an indifferent and timid fellow.
Lord All-Powerful, you sought the help of a powerless man.
By your own choosing you are in need of us.



Lord, I need others.
The way of man is too hard to be trodden alone.
But I avoid the hands outstretched to help me,
I want to act alone,
I want to fight alone,
I want to succeed alone.
And yet beside me walk a friend, a spouse, a brother, a neighbor, a fellow-worker.
You have placed them near me, Lord, and too often I ignore them.
And yet it is together that we shall save the world.

Lord, even if they are requisitioned, grant that I may see, that I may accept, all the Simons on my road.

6. A WOMAN WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS



"We carry about continually in our bodies the dying state of Jesus, so that the living power of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies too." (2 Cor 4:10)

"At present, we are looking at a confused reflection in a mirror; then, we shall see face to face..." (1 Cor 13: 12)



For a long time, Lord, her eyes were on you;
She suffered from your suffering.
Unable to bear it any longer, she pushed the soldiers aside, and with a cloth of fine linen wiped your face.
Were your bleeding features imprinted on her cloth? Maybe.
In her heart, surely.



Lord, I needed to contemplate you at great length, disinterestedly, as a little brother admires and loves his big brother.

For I want to resemble you; and for that I must first look at you.
If you want, I shall become a little like you, since friends who love each other become one.
But, Lord, too often I carelessly pass in front of you, or am bored when I stop and look at you.
And to others I must be a sad caricature of you.
Forgive my body, eager for pleasures: it does not bring your presence to others.
Forgive my clouded eyes: in them others cannot see your light.
Forgive my encumbered heart: in it others do not see your love.

Nevertheless, Lord, come to me; my door is open.

7. JESUS FALLS FOR THE SECOND TIME



"... they all grew drowsy, and fell asleep" (Matt 25:5).

"Only look well to yourselves; do not let your hearts grow dull ... Keep watch, then, praying at all times, so that you may be found worthy to come safe through all that lies before you, and stand erect to meet the presence of the Son of Man." (Luke 21: 34,36)



Lord, you are spent.
Again you have fallen to the ground.
This time you fall not only from the weight of the Cross but from exhaustion.



Recurrent suffering numbs the will.
My sins, Lord, are dulling my conscience.
I get used to evil very quickly:
A little self-indulgence here,
A small unfaithfulness there,
An unwise action further on,
And my vision becomes obscured; I no longer see stumbling blocks, I no longer see other people on my road,

My ears gradually close; I no longer hear the complaints of men.
I find myself on the ground, on the plain, far from the road you laid out for me.

Lord, I beseech you, keep me young in my efforts,
Spare me the bondage of habit, which lulls to sleep and kills.

8. JESUS REBUKES THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM



"How is it that thou canst see the speck of dust which is in thy brother's eye, and art not aware of the beam which is in thy own? By what right wilt thou say to thy brother, 'Brother, let me rid thy eye of that speck,' when thou canst not see the beam that is in thy own? Thou hypocrite, take the beam out of thy own eye first, and so thou shalt have clear sight to rid thy brother's of the speck." (Luke 6: 41-42)



They weep.
They sob.
It's easy to understand if you see what men have done to him.
And they are helpless, they cannot interfere,
So they weep, they weep in pity.

Lord, you have seen them, you have heard them,
But you said: "Weep first for *your* sins."



To pity your sufferings and the sufferings of the world I manage very well, Lord,
But to weep for my own sins, that's another matter.
I'd as lief bemoan those of others,
It's easier.
I'm well up on that; the whole world passes every day before my tribunal.
I've found plenty of guilt: in politics, economics, slums, alcohol, movies, industry. I see it in many people: in laissez-faire Christians, in priests who don't understand a thing, and in many others, Lord, many others.
All in all, in just about the whole world save me.

Lord, teach me that I am a sinner.

9. JESUS FALLS FOR THE THIRD TIME



"Jesus said to him, 'Believe me, this night, before the cock crows, thou wilt thrice disown me.'" (Matt 26:34)

"Peter was deeply moved when he was asked a third time, 'Dost thou love me?' and said to him, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou canst tell that I love thee.'" (John 21: 17)



Again.

You do not move, for all the soldiers' beating.

Lord, are you dead?

No, but utterly spent.

A minute of terrible anxiety.

But you begin again, just as you are, Lord, and walk on. One step, then another ...

Lord, you have fallen a third time, but this time close to Calvary.



Again.

I fall every time.

I'll never get there.

But I've said that before, Lord, and please forgive me, for you were right with me, you were just testing my trust.

If I become discouraged, I am lost.

If I keep up the fight, I am saved.

For you fell a third time, but you had nearly reached Calvary.

10. JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS



"The time has come now for the Son of Man to achieve his glory. Believe me when I tell you this; a grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die, or else it remains nothing more than a grain of wheat; but if it dies, then it yields rich fruit." (John 12: 23-24)



You had nothing left but your own cloak;
You were fond of it, your Mother had woven it for you.
But this, too, had to go.
One thing only is needful, Lord, your Cross.

Nothing comes now between you and the Cross;
You are finally going to be united forever,
And together you will save the world.



And so, Lord, I must give up all these trappings which hinder me and hide me from your sight.
This "possessing" which stifles the "being" in me and separates me from others.
Thus, Lord, little by little all in my life must die which is not an expression of your will.

I don't like it, Lord. It's always a question of dying!
How demanding you are!
I give, and you want more.
I'd like to keep a few trifles,
A few trifles I cling to and can't bring myself to offer you.

...

But if you want all, Lord, take all.
Strip me, yourself, of my last garment.
For I well know that we must die to deserve life,
As the seed must die to yield the golden grain.

11. JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS



"... with Christ I hang upon the cross, and yet I am alive; or rather, not I; it is Christ that lives in me. True, I am living, here and now, this mortal life; but my real life is the faith I have in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal 2: 19-20)



Lord, you stretch at full length on the Cross.

There.

Without a doubt, it is made for you.

You cover it entirely, and to adhere to it more surely, you allow men to nail you carefully to it.

Lord, it was work well done, conscientiously done.

Now you fit your Cross exactly, as the mechanic's carefully filed parts fit the engineer's blueprint.

There had to be this precision.



Thus, Lord, I must gather my body, my heart, my spirit,

And stretch myself at full length on the Cross of the present moment.

I haven't the right to choose the wood of my passion.

The Cross is ready, to my measure.

You present it to me each day, each minute, and I must lie on it.

It isn't easy. The present moment is so limited that there is no room to turn around.

And yet, Lord, I can meet you nowhere else.

It's there that you await me.

It's there that together we shall save our brothers.

12. JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS



"... he dispossessed himself, and took the nature of a slave, fashioned in the likeness of men, and presenting himself to us in human form; and then he lowered his own dignity, accepted an obedience which brought him to death, death on a cross." (Phil 2: 7-8)

"... we too must be ready to lay down our lives for the sake of our brethren." (1 John 3: 16)



A few hours more,
A few minutes more,
A few instants more.
For thirty-three years it has been going on.
For thirty-three years you have lived fully minute after minute.
You can no longer escape, now; you are there, at the end of your life, at the end of your road.
You are at the last extremity, at the edge of a precipice.
You must take the last step,
The last step of love,
The last step of life that ends in death.
You hesitate.
Three hours are long, three hours of agony;
Longer than three years of life,
Longer than thirty years of life.

You must decide, Lord, all is ready around you.
You are there, motionless, on your Cross.
You have renounced all activity other than embracing these crossed planks for which you were made.
And yet, there is still life in your nailed body.
Let mortal flesh die, and make way for Eternity.

Now, life slips from each limb, one by one, finding refuge in his still-beating heart,
Immeasurable heart,
Overflowing heart,
Heart heavy as the world, the world of sins and miseries that it bears.

Lord, one more effort.
Mankind is there, waiting unknowingly for the cry of its Saviour.
Your brothers are there; they need you.
Your Father bends over you, already holding out his arms.
Lord, save us,
Save us.

See.
He has taken his heavy heart,
And
Slowly,
Laboriously,
Alone between heaven and earth,
In the awesome night,
With passionate love,
He has gathered his life,
He has gathered the sin of the world,
And in a cry,
He has given ALL.
"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."



Christ has just died for us.



Lord, help me to die for you.
Help me to die for them.

13. JESUS IS GIVEN TO HIS MOTHER



"... and his mother said to him, 'My Son, why hast thou treated us so? Think, what anguish of mind thy father and I have endured, searching for thee: But he asked them, 'What reason had you to search for me? Could you not tell that I must needs be about my Father's business?'" (Luke 2: 48-49)



Your work is done,
You can leave your Cross,
You can come down to rest, you have surely earned it.

Slowly you slip down, like a man weary of labor and drowsy with sleep.
Your mother takes you in her arms.
You rest in peace.
Over your face, calm and serene, there passes a ray of joy. All is accomplished.
You have made your mother suffer, but she is proud of you.
"Sleep now, my little one, your Mother is watching you."



Thus each night, my day ended, I fall asleep.
What a state I am in sometimes, Lord.
But, alas, it is not always in serving the Father that I have become soiled and tired.
Mary, will you be willing, even so, to watch over me every night?
My body is weighed down with its failures, but my heart asks forgiveness.
Don't forget, you are the refuge of sinners.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a poor sinner.
Grant that through the merits of your Son, I may never fall asleep without receiving the forgiveness of our Father,
That, each night, resting in peace in your arms, I may learn how to die.

14. JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB



"... in this mortal frame of mine, I help to pay off the debt which the afflictions of Christ still leave to be paid, for the sake of his body, the Church." (Col 1:24)

"The sufferings of Christ, it is true, overflow into our lives; but there is overflowing comfort, too, which Christ brings to us." (2 Cor 1:5)



Let's forget it now,
And all go home.
He is buried and the stone is in place.
His family is in tears, his friends are lost.
This time it is really over.



Lord, it is not over.
"You are in agony till the end of time," I know.
Men tread in relays the Way of the Cross.
The resurrection will only be completed when they have reached the end of the Way.
I am on the road; I have a small share of your suffering and the others have theirs.
Together we help you to carry the burden that you have assumed and made divine.
There lies my hope, Lord, and my invincible trust.
There is not a fraction of my little suffering that you have not already lived and transformed into infinite redemption.
When the road is hard and monotonous,
When it leads to the grave,
I know that beyond the grave you are waiting for me in your glory.

Lord, help me faithfully to travel along my road, at my proper place in the vastness of humanity.
Help me above all to recognize you and to help you in all my pilgrim brothers.
For it would be a lie to weep before your lifeless image if I did not follow you, living, on the road that men travel.